STATE LIBRARY OF PENNSYLVANIA
main,stks 655.092M562 M22
Memorial printed by Fleury Mes

0 0001 00317652 4

S

655.092
M562
M22

STATE LIBRARY OF PENNSYLVANIA

PLEASE

RETURN THIS BOOK ON OR BEFORE THE DATE INDICATED

Important:- Do not remove this card from pocket

DATE DUE

OCT 1 3 1976

DO NOT REMOVE SLIPS FROM BOOKS.
A CHARGE IS MADE IF BOOKS ARE
LOST OR DAMAGED.

IDENTIFICATION OF BORROWERS IS REQUIRED

A Memorial Printed By Fleury Mesplet

655.092
M 562
M 22

BRODART
MADE IN U.S.A.

455.092 M562
M22

CLASS BOOK

VOLUME

PENNSYLVANIA
STATE LIBRARY

A MEMORIAL PRINTED BY FLEURY MESPLET

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries

https://archive.org/details/memorialprintedb00mcmu

A Memorial Printed By Fleury Mesplet,

BY

Douglas C. McMurtrie

CHICAGO
LUDLOW TYPOGRAPH COMPANY
MCMXXIX

655.092
M562
M22

Of this booklet, there have been printed in the month of March, 1929, *two hundred and fifty copies only. The cover, title page, all display lines, and folios are Ludlow-set in True-Cut Caslon, with Ludlow borders and ornaments.*

A Memorial Printed By Fleury Mesplet

THE first regularly established printing office in Montreal was, as is well known, that of Fleury Mesplet, who was, beyond question, one of the most picturesque and colorful figures to be found in the ranks of the typographical pioneers on the American continent.

The facts of Mesplet's life have been thoroughly investigated and clearly stated by R. W.

MacLachlan. My main purpose, in the present memorandum, is to reproduce for the first time one of the rarest issues of his press at Montreal, an issue which has exceptional historical interest, bearing on his career as a printer.

To give this single-sheet memorial its proper setting, we may review briefly the salient facts of Mesplet's career.

Fleury Mesplet, born at Lyon, France, about 1735, and apprenticed in youth to the printing trade, came to America in 1774 and set up as a printer in Philadelphia. He had already made an unsuccessful attempt the previous year to establish himself in London—the first of his known imprints appears on a book published there in 1773. But during his sojourn in London, moved by his republican and free-thinking ideas, which had been the reason for his quitting monarchical France, he sought an interview with Benjamin Franklin. Franklin not only advised him to try Philadelphia, but gave him a letter to the American Congress. The American statesman foresaw a possible advantage in having the services of a French printer, in sympathy with the revolutionary movement, through whom to address the people of the

Province of Quebec, who had only recently been brought, unwillingly, under British rule.

Through his letter of introduction from Franklin, Mesplet was commissioned by the Continental Congress to print a 16-page pamphlet addressed "Aux Habitants de la Province de Quebec," which bears the imprint "De l'Imprimerie de Fleury Mesplet," and the date of 1774. But the young City of Brotherly Love was evidently not hospitable to a French "imprimerie," and the following year we find the still-wandering Mesplet on the road once more, seeking a more favorable opportunity in the city of Quebec. By the summer of 1775, however, he was back in Philadelphia, his republican sentiments and his French nationality having made him unwelcome to the British authorities in the Canadian city. Furthermore, he was not only in poor health from the rigors of the journey, but was financially embarrassed as well.

However, he did bring back with him a printing order, picked up *en route* from the Seminary of Montreal, and this he executed at Philadelphia, after his return, in the form of a little 40-page booklet, entitled "Réglement de la Confrèrie de l'adoration perpétuelle du S.

To the Honorable the Preſident and Members of the Congreſs of the United-States.

THE MEMORIAL *of* FLEURY MESPLET *of Montreal, in the Province of Quebec.*

SHEWETH.

THAT your *Memorialiſt* was a Citizen of Philadelphia; and in the Year 1776, was happily Eſtabliſhed in his buſineſs of a Printer in that City: That upon the Conqueſt of a Part of the Province of Quebec by the Arms of the *United-States*, it was thought expedient to Eſtabliſh a *Preſs* in the Town of Montreal; that your *Memorialiſt* on account of his *Language* and known Attachment to the Intereſts of the *United-States*, was ſelected by *Congreſs* to direct ſuch a *Preſs*, and *did* at the requeſt of *Congreſs*, and in hopes of the Support and Recompence of that

great Expence, from Philadelphia to Montreal, where he unceasingly laboured to promote the Interest of the *States*; untill the Evacuation of the Province by their Army, when on Account of the Impossibility of conveying his *Press*, he was constrained to remain in the Exercise of his business, untill he was apprehended and confined in the *Military Prisons* of Quebec as a *State Prisoner*, during the space of three Years and six Months, in which time he constantly wanted the Conveniencies frequently the Necessaries of Life: That the Cessation of Arms has restored him to Personal Liberty, but deprived of the Means of Enjoyment, which can only be restored to him by the Justice and Bounty of *Congress*, in taking into Consideration the Circumstances of his Case, and ordering such relief as it may seem to merit.

Montréal, 1er Août 1783

Henry Mozon

Sacrement et de la bonne mort." And at Philadelphia he now found a financial backer in his friend Charles Berger, who invested generously, if not altogether wisely, in Mesplet's printing enterprises.

In 1776 the shrewd design which had sent Mesplet to America in the first place began to take form in the appointment by the Continental Congress of a commission to visit Canada, with the express stipulation that the commissioners take with them a printer to establish a free press in that country. The commissioners quite naturally chose Mesplet as their printer, and he made hurried preparations to depart. The Congress voted "to defray the expense of transporting him, his family and his printing utensils to Canada" and to pay him $200 besides.

For working capital in his new venture, Mesplet turned once more to his friend Berger, who added about $4,000 in good money to his previous investment, including an item of $560 to pay Mesplet's debts so that he might not be detained by creditors. Laying out about $800 for a new supply of type, for 180 reams of paper, and for other supplies, Mesplet then invested all his own free capital and all he could raise from the sale of his stock

of books on hand in continental currency, and was ready to depart. In his investments, it might be noted in passing, Mesplet showed, like many another adventurous printer before him and since, more enthusiasm than good judgment; his post-mortem inventory lists "a package containing about four hundred and seventy-five *piastres argent*, paper money of the United States, of no value."

Arrived in Montreal on May 6th, 1776, Mesplet by May 18th had fitted up his printing office in the rue Capital, "près le marché," and was ready for business. But before this, his patron, Franklin, had already left Montreal, the mission from Congress a confessed failure; and most of Mesplet's fine paper and books, his stock in trade, had been lost through the capsizing of a boat on the journey northward. To make matters still more difficult, Mesplet and his whole party, including two printers and the editor of the proposed newspaper, whom he had brought with him from Philadelphia, were jailed a month later as sympathizers with the rebels, and after their release, in mid July, the editor resigned in disgust and sailed for France.

In spite of these discouragements, Mesplet

printed three books in Montreal before the year 1776 was over. The first of these, and the first book to bear a Montreal imprint, was a revised and enlarged edition of the 40-page "Réglement de la Confrèrie," already mentioned.

The projected newspaper did not materialize until 1778. First issued as *La Gazette du Commerce et Littéraire*, and later, after being suppressed for a few weeks, reappearing as *La Gazette Littéraire*, it lasted just a year and brought its editor, Valantin Joutard, and Mesplet, its publisher, to jail. Here Mesplet remained without trial for three years and three months, until he was finally allowed to escape, in September, 1782.

Following his imprisonment and until his death in January, 1794, Mesplet continued fairly active as a printer, but kept clear of political entanglements. About forty books and pamphlets bearing his imprint, or otherwise clearly ascribable to him, are known by existing copies, and there are over thirty others mentioned in advertisements and inventories. He printed in English as well as French, also in Latin and Iroquois.

He did honest work on good paper, and his binding was of good material and well executed.

His printing evidenced typographic taste of a high order. But he seems to have lived in a chronic state of insolvency, and was once sold out for debt. His creditors, with only two exceptions, lost heavily by their confidence in him, including his generous friend Charles Berger, who received in all about ten cents on the dollar. The two exceptions were small creditors who were paid out of the patrimony of Mesplet's second wife.

Mesplet frequently memorialized the United States Congress, seeking compensation for his outlays in moving to Montreal. One of these memorials, the only existing copy of which is preserved in the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C., is reproduced here for the first time (pages 8 and 9).

It is a product of the early Montreal press of great historic interest. With its intriguing historical associations, it may serve as a reminder of the man, as well as for a sample from Montreal's first commercial printing and publishing house.